

I Won't Tell 'Em Your Name by MonsterSquad

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Summary:

Mike meets Eleven when she takes the only seat left on a bus ride from Hawkins to New York City, which happens to be the seat next to him. She's running away from bad things and he's hoping to find something good In New York, having finished college. Upon getting to know her over the ride, Eleven makes Mike feel whole and Mike gives Eleven a sense of home. But will they throw their fears aside?

I Won't Tell 'Em Your Name

Author's Note:

I was listening to the song Name by the Goo Goo Dolls and it made me think of this. I'm working on some other stuff but I wanted to write this. I hope you like it.

The rain made everything go slower. Mike Wheeler sat in his aisle seat on a Greyhound bus waiting to depart from Hawkins, Indiana. It was almost 4:00, well, it was 3:53 to be exact and the bus had been scheduled to leave at 3:30. Looking around him, Mike noticed that the vehicle was almost filled to capacity, the only open seat being right next to him by the window. He had taken the aisle so he could stretch his legs. The ride to New York would be close to twenty-two hours long.

He finally felt the bus start to shift and thought he was on his way. Suddenly though, the driver stopped and opened the door. A girl quickly boarded and showed the driver her ticket. She was soaked from head to toe and her hair was plastered to her face. Mike watched as she surveyed the area for an empty seat. Her big eyes met his as she realized the only one available was next to him. She made her way down the aisle, carrying only one duffle bag. Mike stood up so she could slide into the window seat. Once she was seated the bus departed the terminal.

He could tell that she was cold. She had to be since her clothes were wet with rain. He could also hear her teeth chattering. She was trying to quell the noise but she was failing. Mike reached under his seat and pulled his bag out enough to unzip it. He rummaged through it and found a towel.

"Here, you can use this to dry off a little bit. If you take your coat off you might also be warmer." Mike handed the girl his towel. She looked surprised but then she started trying to wiggle out of her coat. Mike saw that she was having trouble from her seated position. "Let me help you." He pulled her sleeve, not noticing how

she flinched when his hand touched her left wrist, but once one arm was out of the coat she had a much easier time removing the rest of the garment.

“Thank you.” She said as she stashed her wet coat in the floor and started to run the towel over her hair. Once she had dried it some it took on a whole different look. It was slightly curly and landed a little past her shoulders. Mike watched her dry off.

Stop it, Mike. You’re being creepy.

“My name is Mike. Are you going to New York too or are you stopping somewhere else?” Mike asked, trying to start a conversation so his looking at her didn’t seem so awkward.

“I’m just trying to get far away.” She replied quietly. Mike noticed for the first time how scared she really looked.

“Are you okay? You seem afraid.” Mike lowered the volume of his voice so as not to draw attention to them.

“Some bad men are trying to find me.”

“Why?” Mike’s curiosity was getting the best of him. She was pretty, *really pretty*, he now realized and he was interested in why she was running away, or from *whom*.

She shook her head and lowered her eyes. She still looked cold. Mike removed the navy blue hoodie he was wearing.

“Do you want to wear this? I don’t mind at all. I’m not cold and clearly you are.” She looked up at him, her face a picture of disbelief. “Really, it’s okay. You’ll feel better. I promise.” Mike handed her the sweatshirt. She wrapped it around herself, sliding her arms into the sleeves. It swallowed her because Mike was so much taller than she. He couldn’t help thinking how cute she looked in it with the sleeves hanging past her hands.

“Thanks. I do feel warmer now.” She gave him a weak smile.

“So what’s your name?” Mike asked after sitting in silence beside her for almost thirty minutes. She looked at him. She looked fearful again. Mike tried to make her feel safer. “It’s just that we’ll be sitting here for a long time and I thought maybe we could talk if you wanted to, about things now and then, and I’d just like to know your name. But if you don’t want to tell me you don’t have to. It’s okay.” He tried to seem chipper and nonthreatening.

She looked down at her hands. “Eleven.” She whispered.

“Did you say Eleven?” Mike tried to hide the shock in his voice.

“It’s all I’ve ever been called. I’ve never had what you might call a *normal* life.” She said, sighing. When she looked at Mike again she had tears in her eyes.

“I know you don’t know me, but do you want to talk about it? We have nothing but time.” Mike’s voice was sincere and comforting.

Eleven thought the man sitting next to her had the most caring eyes she’d ever seen. He had immediately offered to help her which was new to her. The thought occurred to her that she could use someone to talk to, she had never had that, only being told what to do and then running. So much running the past few years. She was weary.

“Until I was twelve I was raised in a government lab and then I escaped but since then I’ve been going from place to place hiding and then running again. I was in Hawkins because my mother died. I only found out that she was alive about nine years ago but she was catatonic so I never got to have a real relationship with her. I came back to see her grave. I shouldn’t have. I should have known they would know to be looking for me. They always know.” She hung her head.

Mike was speechless. For the first time she looked *broken* and not just scared. “Can I ask why you were in a government lab? You don’t have to tell me but that’s kind of information that begs for some follow-up.”

Eleven looked around at the other passengers. No one was looking at

them, all seeming to be in their own worlds. “They took me from my mother when I was a baby.” She tentatively pulled the sleeve of the hoodie up until her wrist was exposed. She held her arm out to Mike. There was a small 011 tattooed onto her wrist like she was inventory, something to be cataloged.

Mike couldn’t stop himself from touching the numbers inked into her flesh. Eleven felt his fingers brush over them. Her stomach had a fluttery feeling she had never experienced.

“What did they want with you? Why would they do that?” Mike was still holding her wrist and Eleven found that she didn’t mind.

“I don’t want to say here. You might cause a scene and I don’t want people to look at me. Maybe when we stop for a break I can find a way to show you. I don’t ever want to go back to that place so I have to get away and find a place to disappear.”

The sun had set. As Mike and Eleven had been talking the bus slowly pulled to the shoulder of the road. Eleven immediately looked frantically out the window, craning to see why they had stopped. She saw two policemen and one man in a lab coat walking to the door of the bus. She looked at Mike with panic in her eyes.

“They’re here!” She whispered in fear. “I don’t have any way to get out. They’re going to find me.” Her breathing was suddenly more shallow. It was slightly dark on the bus so Mike did the only thing he could think to do. He pushed her into the window and started kissing her, making sure his shoulders and head covered as much of her figure as possible. He moved his hands to the sides of her face to further distort her image. With his dark locks of hair protruding every which way her head was almost entirely hidden.

He could hear voices of men speaking to the driver as they boarded the bus.

We’re looking for someone who may have taken this bus from Hawkins. We need to do a quick search.

Mike continued to kiss Eleven.

When Mike had practically covered her with his body and started kissing her, Eleven hadn't been sure what to do. She realized after a few seconds what he was trying to do and went along with it. After a few minutes she almost forgot that she was being hunted by the bad men. She was actually enjoying the kiss. Her instincts had kicked in and her mouth moved with his like it had always been meant to be locked with his lips. The kiss was soft and Mike's hands on her face felt warm and safe, the opposite of what she normally felt in her everyday life. She kept her eyes closed and moved her hands into his hair.

Mike didn't stop, his plan had been to continue to act like a couple making out and to not even look up as the men walked down the aisle of the bus looking at everyone. He could sense people standing behind them but he only played more into his act and let a soft moan escape as he kept his hands on Eleven's face, his long fingers making it very hard to see who she might be. He heard one of the men chuckle as he said, *I remember those days. Come on, she's not here.*

When the bus started moving again Mike pulled away from Eleven. "I'm sorry about that. It was all I could think to do to hide you." He looked apologetic.

Eleven had to catch her breath before replying. "It's okay. It *worked*. I don't know how to thank you." She smiled and noticed that she was holding his hand. She pulled it away.

"I'm probably a terrible kisser." Mike said with a note of self-deprecation, trying to lighten the mood. Eleven was quiet.

"You were the first person to ever kiss me." She looked at her lap and wouldn't meet his gaze. "I thought it was really nice."

Mike hadn't thought of that possibility. The kiss had been probably the best he'd ever had, not that he'd had many. It had felt natural and felt *right*.

"So did I." Mike said, blush creeping into his cheeks.

"If they had made us talk to them they would have taken you too. I've never had friends because of the danger I would put them in. It's very lonely." Eleven said, her voice shaky with emotion.

"So they lock you away and treat you like an animal and then threaten anyone who tries to get close to you? That's so messed up. I still don't understand what they even want with you." Mike covered her hand with his. Eleven didn't pull away, thinking instead how nice the contact felt. She let silent tears roll down her face. Mike threaded his fingers in hers and squeezed, not knowing what to do but let her cry.

A little past 10:00 the bus pulled into a truck stop to refuel and to let the passengers stretch a bit and get something to eat. They would be stopped for thirty minutes.

"Come with me," Eleven said, taking Mike's hand and leading him to the side of the building. There was a camera but they stood directly underneath it so it wouldn't see them. There were no other people around and they were facing woods at the back of the travel plaza. "I'm going to show you why they want me back but you can't freak out, okay?"

Mike nodded. He watched as Eleven stretched out her right arm toward a cinder block that was near a dumpster. It lifted from the ground and levitated in the air before it shot up again about twenty feet. Then it lowered to the ground, landing where it had started. Eleven turned to Mike.

"That's why. I can move things. With my mind. I can also find people with my mind, sort of spy on them, and they want to use me as a weapon. They could make me kill people."

Mike was stunned but when he noticed blood trickling from her nose he was pulled back into reality. "Are you okay? Your nose..." His voice was now full of worry.

Eleven wiped her nose with her hand, leaving a smear of blood on her palm. "That always happens when I do that. It also makes me tired. Are you afraid of me now?" She asked, her tone anxious.

Mike regarded the girl in front of him. She was so small, but clearly so powerful. She was so quiet, but her eyes said so much. All he wanted to do was protect her even though she had just told him she was a weapon.

“I’m not afraid. I read comics. You should have been enrolled at the Xavier School for Gifted Youngsters instead of being locked up and used.” Mike smiled warmly at her, causing the fluttery feeling in her stomach to return. “Let’s get something to eat and then you can sleep on the bus.” He had noticed how after she showed him what she could do her shoulders were more slumped and her eyes seemed darker, more tired.

“I spent all of my money on the bus ticket. You go get something for you.” Eleven said. She was going to head back to the bus.

“Stop. It’s on me. Get whatever you want.” Mike grabbed her hand before she could leave.

After sharing some chicken strips and fries they went back to their seats on the bus. Eleven leaned against the window and closed her eyes. Mike didn’t think she looked comfortable.

“Hey, El?” He gently spoke.

She raised her eyelids and looked at him. “Why did you call me El?”

“I just thought, you know, short for Eleven. A nickname? If you don’t like it I won’t-”

“I like it. It’s like a normal name.” She smiled at him. “What did you want to say?”

He pulled her over so that she was against his side. “I was going to say you can lay your head against me if you want to sleep. I thought you’d be more comfortable. You don’t have to.” He felt her sigh contentedly.

“Thanks, Mike.” He put his arm around her and she snuggled into his

side, not being tall enough to lay her head on his shoulder.

It was almost 6:00 in the morning when the bus stopped again. Mike and El had slept snuggled against each other all night, El's arm having moved around his waist at some point. She seemed embarrassed when she realized how tightly she was embracing him. She sat up quickly.

"I'm sorry. I didn't know I had moved. I'm not used to sleeping so near to anyone."

"Were you comfortable?" Mike asked.

He watched as her cheeks tinted pink. "I slept better than ever." Her eyes met his and then quickly darted to her lap.

"Me too. I liked having your arm around me. Don't feel weird about it." Mike gave her a smile and she felt herself melt a little.

As the day progressed Mike told El about his life, how he had graduated college in the spring and was planning possibly to move to New York to find a job in the publishing industry. He had always liked to write and with his degree he was hoping he could find a job as an editor while he worked on novels and stories, planning to shop them around to different houses and see if he could find someone to publish them. His sister and her husband lived in New York City after finishing at NYU and he could stay with them while he considered his options.

"You like to write?" She asked, interested in his method.

"Yeah. Since I was a little kid I've liked to make up stories. I was the dungeon master for my group of friends when we'd play D&D and I wrote all the campaigns. My friends enjoyed them."

"D&D?" She didn't understand.

"It's a game. It stands for Dungeons & Dragons. It's a fantasy roleplaying game." El nodded at this, understanding more what he meant. "Any time we were out, like at an airport or a park or

anywhere there were lots of people I would look around and find someone to make up a story about. Like if it was a guy sitting in an airport terminal I'd make up a story in my mind. I'd name him and say why he was at the airport, where he was going, what he'd do when he got there. It helped pass the time waiting. I guess I liked to use my imagination. I read a lot of comics as a kid." He laughed quietly.

"That's probably why you're so accepting of *me*." El smiled sweetly at him.

"We can do it now if you want." Mike's voice went down to a whisper. "Look at that man over there in the brown leather jacket. What should we name him?" Mike's eyes danced as he watched El thinking of a name. She was leaning over his lap so she could see the man sitting a few rows ahead of them on the opposite side of the aisle.

"I don't know. You do the first one and I'll see what you do." Her eyebrows raised as if to ask if that would be all right.

"Okay. Let's say his name is Tom. Tom Sutton. He almost became a major league baseball player but he threw out his elbow and never really recovered enough to play after the minor leagues. He started gambling and lost all his money so now he's taking the bus to visit his brother, whom he hasn't seen since they had a falling out over a woman they had both been interested in. She wound up choosing neither of them, by the way, but they still never buried the hatchet. He's hoping he can borrow some money from him to pay off the loan sharks so they don't break his knees."

"Huh. Yeah, I can see that." El beamed at him.

"Now you see if you can do it. Use the same guy." Mike's tone was encouraging.

"Hmm. Okay. His name is John Cooper and he's a janitor at an elementary school. He's on his way to New York to see the Empire State Building because he wants to drop a penny from the top." El seemed satisfied with her case history.

“That was great! See? Same guy can be so many different people. Anyway, that’s what I like to do. Someday I’d like to write a really good novel with characters that I love. I need a good idea.” *You are a pretty good idea. I’d like to write about you,* Mike thought as he gazed at El.

They were having fun turning the people on the bus into characters. At one point though, El stopped laughing and got quiet.

“This is the first time I can remember just talking to someone like a friend. It feels really nice. I have a sister, she’s not really my sister but she was in the lab with me and she escaped too but we’re very different people. I’ve stayed with her a couple of times and I never feel like I want to be there. She’s very angry, which I understand because I am too, but I don’t want to be angry. I want to be happy. It just has never happened yet. I want to be safe and I feel like, for me, safe and happy don’t go together.” She looked at him seriously, “Mike, you should never tell anyone about me. I wouldn’t be able to forgive myself if something happened to you because of me. These people don’t care who or what gets in their way. When we get to New York we’ll have to go our separate ways forever.”

Mike frowned. That was the *last* thing he wanted to hear. He had already become sort of attached to this woman and had let himself think about things like *the future* and he had pictured her in his.

“New York has so many people. I’m sure we could be anonymous.” Mike countered.

“I don’t think there can be a *we*, Mike. Even though I wish there could be.” She looked so sad once more.

Mike looked at his watch. It was a little after 3:00.

“So we only have a few more hours then. I’m just going to say it. I really like you. I feel like I’m supposed to know you and since you’ve been next to me I’ve felt more whole than I have in a really long time. I know that sounds crazy.” Mike shook his head.

"It doesn't sound crazy. I feel the same way. But I could never put you in danger."

Mike pulled her into him and she let him hold her. His arms felt like what she had always imagined home would feel like. She buried her face in his neck and memorized his scent.

The lights of New York City came into view a few hours later. Mike and El had spent the time locked in an embrace, occasionally kissing and occasionally wiping away stray tears. Mike felt his chest tighten as the city drew closer, knowing she planned to go her own way.

"Where will you go? You said you don't have any money? I don't want to think of you roaming the streets or being homeless." Mike softly whispered into her hair.

"I'll find somewhere."

The bus pulled into the terminal in New York City a little past 6:30 in the evening. All of the passengers disembarked and went their separate ways. Mike and El stood together saying their goodbyes.

"Please come with me to my sister's place. At least for tonight. She is very cool but we don't have to tell her anything about you. I don't want you to wander around. Please?" Mike had her pulled against him and he was making it very difficult for her to say no. His eyes were pleading and his voice was so soft. He leaned forward and kissed her gently, then she deepened it.

"I can't, Mike. That would put her in danger too." She was about to cry again.

"They don't know where you are, El. They would have sent people by now. You were *right there* and they missed you. I think in a city with this many people you'll be safe. Is it worth being alone forever because you *might* cause a problem when you could be *happy*? I think it's a risk worth taking. That's how life works. It's all a risk but the risk makes it exciting. I know you're worth the risk *to me*." Mike was making some strong points.

She wiped away her tears. “I would love to stay with you, Mike. I just can’t. I’m sorry. I’m not a risk that you should take.”

He was visibly upset but he held it together. “This is not what I want but I can’t make you do anything. I *won’t* because that’s all they ever did to you. You can make your own decisions and if this isn’t what you want then I can’t do anything about it. But I’ll always be here and I’ll never tell anyone about you. I promise.” He kissed her one more time, their arms wrapping around each other and holding tightly in their last minutes together.

“Take this. I don’t want you to have nothing. Please don’t say no.” Mike pushed money into her hand, his eyes begging her to take his offering. “I need to know you can eat if you’re hungry.”

Tears were running down El’s cheeks again but she put the money in her pocket. She stood on the tips of her toes to kiss him on the cheek.

“Goodbye, Mike.” She turned to look at him one last time before she walked away. He watched her until he could no longer see her outline on the sidewalk. He grabbed his bag and headed to the subway to go to his sister’s apartment.

El hated that she left him standing there. All she wanted was to be back with him but she had been so disciplined to take the path of least resistance and always be guarded that she had let her brain override her heart. As the evening progressed she found a shelter where she could sleep for the night. She wished that she had listed to Mike but here she was. As she was lying in bed she closed her eyes and reached out with her mind.

Mike was in a bedroom, what looked like a guest room, in the bed. He looked sad. El watched as he tossed and turned in the bed. She could hear him whispering to himself.

I don’t want you to be lonely. I wish you were here. I would never tell them anything about you. I promise I’ll find you, El.

She heard how desperate he sounded but she understood. She felt

the same way. She let her mind carry her back through the apartment, noting the apartment number, before seeing the address and memorizing landmarks. At least she knew where he was. She wasn't sure she should try to find him but she wanted to. She had never wanted anything more.

For the next two weeks El applied to a few jobs, a few in bars, small resale shops, places that were dark or more off the radar. It looked to her like one of the bars might work out for her. Her sister had given her fake identification but she did not have a passport so she would have to stay in the country. She was sleeping at the local YMCA. Twice she went to where she knew Mike was staying just to see if she'd see him come outside to go anywhere. So far she hadn't.

Mike toured the city with his sister, seeing all the tourist attractions. He couldn't really enjoy it because everywhere they went he spent the whole time scanning the area for El. She had to be *somewhere*. He found himself wondering if she had eaten that day or if she was sleeping somewhere warm at night. The worry was making his stomach ache.

It was another rainy night. Mike was eating dinner with his sister and her husband when there was a knock at the door. His sister's husband, Jonathan, got up to answer it. Mike could hear muffled voices from his place at the table.

"Hey, Mike, someone wants to see you." Jonathan nodded toward the door.

Waiting just inside the room was El. Mike had her in his arms in three steps. Her hair was wet from rain, again.

"How did you find me?" He said as he hugged her.

"Um, just something I can do." She said quietly. "I'm sorry. I couldn't stay away."

"Don't be sorry. I'm so happy you found me." Mike looked into her eyes and she felt herself getting lost in his. "Please stay with me." He said as he leaned down to kiss her.

She had wanted that. She had thought about it all the time the previous two weeks while she was wrestling with whether she should take a chance. In the end she decided that Mike was right about life and risk. She had thought about how *normal* he made her feel and how honest he had been with her and how accepting he'd been of what she was. He didn't look at her like she was a monster. She knew he'd never tell and she wouldn't be lonely anymore.

Her life had been a series of one bad thing after another, or one bad person after another, then always running away, always lonely. Mike's life had been making up stories of other people to escape his own loneliness, always looking for some way to make his life more complete, some person to make him feel whole. The universe gave them each other.

Author's Note:

I couldn't make the ending as melancholy as the song. It's my Mileven!